

# The Elementary ENGLISH REVIEW

*Official Organ: National Council of Teachers of English*

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 Beautiful, beautiful Soup!"*

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From ALICE IN WONDERLAND. By Lewis Carroll.  
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# The Elementary ENGLISH REVIEW

VOLUME VII

JANUARY 1930

NUMBER I

## Let the Child Read\*

THOMAS C. BLAISDELL

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Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania*

I WOULD have every child leave the sixth grade with such a love of reading as will influence all his after life.

I would have the reading habit firmly fixed in the child of twelve years. I would have it so firmly fixed that even the uninteresting literature requirements of later years will be unable to affect it.

I would have this child reading books that interest him and nothing else; not books that are mere "time-killers;" not books that are less than the best; but those books which every child should read.

I would have every teacher who meets a child during his first half dozen years of school life constantly keep this aim before her.

I would have superintendents and principals and supervisors, as well as teachers, co-operating in the attainment of this end.

For what is more important for the child to take with him into junior high school than the reading habit? What will help him more in mastering every textbook that he meets during the next six years, the next ten years? What will do more to give him power to express his thoughts and feelings either orally or in writing?

Does not a love of reading, the reading habit, carry with it a rapid reading rate,

with a high degree of comprehension? And are not these acquirements an almost magic key to unlock the storehouses of education which lie within books?

No, the reading habit is not an open sesame to every door of education. It may not develop the power of co-operation; it will not insure initiative; it is not in itself able to develop keen observation, although it will help much toward that important educational end. But its efficacy is so boundless that no teacher should ever feel herself free from the duty of striving to develop it.

Give the child an interested teacher and interesting books, and he will develop the reading habit.

A few children find these two essentials in the home. The parents love books; they surround the child with books; they have the story hour during pre-school years, thus making literature a part of the very life of the child; they read to and with the child; they read "temptation samples" from interesting books adapted to the age of the child, and the child does the rest; they suggest books that they are sure are adapted to the mood of the child; they help in a thousand ways.

Then a few other children are born to

\*This is the first of a series of articles prepared by members of the Committee on Elementary School English of the National Council of Teachers of English. One article will appear each month.



the purple; they naturally love books; nothing can keep them from their favorite pastime of reading. There may be no books in the home; the parents may be illiterate; but these fortunate children will find books and will read and enjoy them.

But the multitude of children under the ministrations of the public school do not belong to either of these classes. The few who are so fortunate need no attention from the teacher; as far as reading is concerned, they are sufficient unto themselves. But they do need the unceasing enthusiasm of the teacher. Without it they will never learn the love that makes books almost more necessary than food or clothing.

The unceasing enthusiasm of the teacher! This is the first need of every child in the public schools—a teacher possessing a burning enthusiasm for books. Should any person without such enthusiasm be permitted to teach children during the first six years of their school life? Love of children, skill and joy in story-telling, and enthusiasm for books; are not these the three most important qualifications for a teacher of one of the first six grades? In later grades these characteristics are needed; in these grades they are the essentials! Yet how many teachers lack all three!

May I ask you who are reading this paragraph whether you have a deep-seated enthusiasm for reading? Is it a dominant power in your daily life? Would you rather read than dance, or play bridge, or go to the movies, or drive your car? Are you moved to read when you should be sleeping? Do you read such literature as every woman of your age and station should read, or are you satisfied with "time-killers?" If you do not have this love of reading, do you wish it? Did your teachers fail to give it to you? Are you going to continue to fail to implant it in the children entrusted to you by a confiding and all but helpless public?

It is not easy to develop the reading habit after adult years have been reached, but it can be done. Probably the vigorous

enthusiasm will have to be partly assumed—and it is a teacher's duty to assume it if she lacks it—but certainly a habit of reading interesting and worthy literature can be developed even if school years are long past.

The teacher wishing to develop it must vigorously determine to spend at least a small fixed number of hours at reading interesting books every week—not every day, for there are days when one is really unable to read even a small amount; and she must begin where her interests lie, even though it is in literature which she knows is far removed from the "highbrow." Begin with a book that interests you; if the first fifty pages do not grip you, give that book up and take another. When developing the reading habit, read only that which is of real interest; it is the "grip" in a book that eventuates in habits.

Make the determination strong enough and keep up the weekly reading of a small minimum of thrilling interesting literature for a year, perhaps for two years, and the result is certain, the habit will be developed. Of course the grade of literature must gradually rise so that it gets at least to the books just below the highest, those which every person of your age and station should read; but with occasional advice asked for frankly and given conscientiously, the teacher who wishes to be helpful to her pupils will attain her aim.

And now the child.

Keep him in the presence of books from his first day in school.

In every schoolroom below junior high school—and preferably in every schoolroom of every grade—there should be a room library, a shelf of books numbering at least as many as there are pupils in the room, and preferably twice as many. These books should be carefully selected from books which children have enjoyed; not a book that has not stood the acid test of the child's thrilled, overmastering interest. To-day we know such books for every grade. They have stood not only the child's test;

they have satisfied the specialists; they are not "time-killers;" they are books every child should read. They should be adapted to the grade; that is, perhaps half of them should be for the given grade, a few for a grade above, many for a grade below.

These books should be for use, not for show. The pupils should have free access to them before school, at recess, after school; and pupils should be urged, encouraged, persuaded to take them home and read them; they should probably not be required to do this. The teacher should daily have a period—it may be only five minutes—during which she introduces these books to the pupils. She should tell the story of the early pages, then read a thrilling passage, and then offer the book to the pupils who hesitate to take books home. She should read the first few pages when the books begin as all books should, that is, with interest from the first paragraph, and then should put the books into the hands of the boy or girl to whom it will perhaps appeal. She should often tell very briefly much of the story of a book, and then ask who would like to read it, of course never revealing all that is interesting. She should have frequent rendezvous with each pupil who does not like to read. Perhaps she should tell him a story; perhaps she should read "temptation samples;" perhaps she should put the books into his hands and let him read aloud to her; perhaps she will find him a child requiring a prescription of her own devising; but she should make him realize that books have in them that which thrills. For only the books with "thrill" are potent to develop the reading habit, to make pupils love books. Is not that the reason boys read "penny thrillers" and "dime dreadfuls?"

In the earlier grades, books with appealing bindings and with numerous illustrations should be preferred; if finances permit these same characteristics should be present in the books of even advanced grades. But the little fellows must have beautiful bindings and interesting pictures.

In each of the first three grades a dozen textbooks adapted to the grade, so that the child almost from the beginning may be really reading by himself. Perhaps there will be only one or two copies of most of these "readers," but the more of each there are, the better. In addition to these, many real story books. No merely informational literature; or at most very little. Stories develop the love and habit of reading, stories of boys and girls and pets; and as time advances stories of men and women, simple biographical material which thrills rather than informs. Interest must always be the dominant element. Put before children only the books that will grip them.

What of the school where not a single volume is available for the room library? The teacher must do all in her power to persuade the mighty to furnish at least a few books as a beginning. Perhaps an enthusiastic presentation of the matter will bring a real school room library. But if nothing can be done by persuasion, let the pupils give an entertainment, inviting parents and friends. Take up a collection, or charge an admission fee. That may supply a small fund with which to begin. Or the teacher may have to begin by supplying a few books which she has cherished since her own childhood, or which she has purchased with her own money; for pupils must have books, or starve to death spiritually. And the teacher must see that they have this food. The teacher who has adequate enthusiasm will find a way or make a way to have books for her pupils to handle and love, books which they will feel are their intimate friends.

A three-sentence story about the book read is a form of report that takes little time and that pupils enjoy. But never make pupils report on what they have read. Merely give them the opportunity. Make it a privilege, not a task.

Every enthusiastic teacher will find a way to "let the child read."

But never forget the potency of the school room library.

# Shade of Samuel Morse

F. K. STRATTON

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LITTLE did the thought of a real project enter the mind of the new teacher of composition in grade five of Wallace School. He was busy trying to keep from being swamped. If you can imagine the feelings of a man who has graduated from the job of head of the department of English in a junior-senior high school to the task of instilling the love of reading and composition into the minds of 150 young hopefuls in grades five and six of a departmentalized elementary school, you know something of the trepidation with which this particular instructor entered upon his duties.

Let us pass over the reading experiences which the pupils are supposed to have gone through. Needless to say, this young man has been changing some of his ideas about teaching conditions in the grades. No longer will he blame elementary school teachers when they send pupils on who are seemingly not well grounded in the fundamentals of English.

But this started out to be a story of a project. The composition teacher had read theoretical discussions of the project method, which explained how all school work should be built on and from the interests of the children. The theory sounded fine, but ah! the actual practice! Eagerly had he searched his records of the pupils' interests in the vain hope that an assignment might be concocted which would strike a responsive chord in the boys and girls who so plainly were ready to work if they were exposed to something that seemed to them worthwhile. Alas! Each day the youngsters were forced to be contented with an assignment, such as, "Sup-

pose you met a man on East Fourteenth Street who wanted to get to Union Park. Write the directions so clearly that he would be able to reach his destination after reading your paper." Fine motivation! Did Johnny need to be told to get to work? Was there a discipline problem for this teacher to attempt to settle?

One day, with dogged persistence, he decided to try to get some talks from his 5A class on the general topic, "How To Make, or How To Do." Remembering his own experiences as a youth, the teacher led up to the assignment with a model (?) talk on "How to Make a Telegraph." Morse probably did a quarter turn when he heard the lucid exposition, but anyone knows that two or three layers of copper wire wound around a nail driven into a board will make an A-I magnet when the two ends of the wire are touched to the posts of a battery. A piece of tin, cut from a can, furnishes the sounder when nailed to the board and bent into proper position over the magnet. Another piece of tin can be cut and bent into shape for the key.

The original idea, to secure talks on "How To Make," was the usual half-hearted semi-success. But a new interest took root. The next day two boys announced proudly that they had constructed telegraphs that really worked. Since the instructor is still somewhat of a boy himself, he asked them to bring their models to school for a demonstration. If a salesman's demonstration could catch popular fancy as successfully as did that of these boys, he could name his own salary.

The telegraph became the talk of the



hour. Boys gathered in groups before and after school while the teacher tried to explain why this telegraph didn't work and why that battery had no "juice." Two days later, two enterprising young fifth grade boys announced that they were going into the business of manufacturing and selling telegraphs. Did they take it as a serious proposition? Does Henry Ford consider his business a joke?

Of course, some advertising was necessary, so a poster had to be made which announced two grades of telegraphs to be sold at 10 cents and 15 cents each, with special prices for wiring, repairs, and what-not. Delivery was free to all parts of the city. One boy who had a bicycle had been hired to deliver. In order that the sales campaign might be opened with a bang, a composition period was used, in which the embryo business men showed a keen knowledge of sales psychology, for they gave a free telegraph to the holder of the lucky number. Imagine the disappointment of all the hopeful boys when the smallest girl in class proved to be the lucky one! But don't think that she didn't want to keep the instrument that she had won!

By this time the teacher was beginning to go 'round and 'round in circles, wondering how to stem the tide of enthusiasm which was playing havoc with order in the classroom. But the history teacher came nobly to the rescue. One day, hearing a hub-bub in the composition room, she stepped in to see what was going on. Immediately she was treated to a demonstration that would have put Morse in the dim background. At noon, during the lunch period, the two teachers held a council of war, so to speak. The history teacher finally decided to give the 5A's a chance to talk about telegraphs during the next morning's home room period. This discussion led to a desire to know something about the inventor himself. At once a committee of three boys was appointed to make a trip to the library for books on the general subject of communication, and that

evening, the group, with their two interested instructors, ransacked the children's department of the city library for volumes written about Morse, inventors and inventions in general, and the wireless.

In the meantime the fever was spreading in the school. Even several 3A boys proudly brought in products of their best endeavors with the request that the composition teacher help them make their instruments work. Two inventive 6B's produced electro-magnetic derricks built upon the same principle as the telegraph. A patent office rather than a composition class seemed necessary. The sale of telegraphs by the 5A partnership increased, and as profits and expenses mounted, the boys were directed to the arithmetic teacher who rose to the occasion by showing them how to keep a simple set of accounts.

Finally, the need was seen by the 5A's for passing on some of their information to the rest of the school, and the composition class plunged into the task of preparing an assembly program. The library books, plus books already in the history room, and several encyclopedias were eagerly perused for information. The city Western Union office was solicited for literature, and then the fun began. Some hot arguments were waged about the various numbers which should be listed on the program. At last the following program was adopted:

1. A talk—How Messages Were Sent Before the Days of the Telegraph.
2. A demonstration of the Boy Scout method of sending messages with flags.
3. A talk—Samuel F. B. Morse—His Life and Experiences with the Telegraph.
4. A three-act play.  
 Scene I—Morse conceives of the idea.  
 Scene II—Morse in his workshop.  
 Scene III—The first message is sent between Washington and Baltimore.
5. A talk—The Wireless.

(Continued on page 10)

# An Experiment in Teaching Poetry to Children

BERT ROLLER

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and

BESS L. STINSON

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WE KNOW very little of children's attitudes toward poetry. Instead of striving toward this understanding by employing the suggestions given us by modern pedagogy, we have been satisfied with lists of poems or anthologies quite often made by people who deal in no way with young people. Miss Teasdale's beautiful collection, *RAINBOW GOLD*, for example, which has been found so popular with progressive teachers, is, in spite of the assurances of the preface, but an example of the good taste of a poet who is not an experienced worker with children.

The lesson taught us more than a half century ago by McGuffey has been forgotten. Our knowledge of what is best in poetry for children, of what they like, and of what awakens them imaginatively, must come from the children themselves. There is no way of discovering this without experimentation.

Here we encounter a difficulty. Poetry is an art, and must be treated always as such. No mathematical test will function. On the other hand, a test requiring the students to analyze their emotions—that is, to tell exactly what they feel—cannot, under any condition, be tolerated. Both are destructive in their tendencies toward crushing out a subtle but amazingly active growth.

One day last winter we read Walter de la Mare's "The Listeners" to a fifth grade class. We told them before beginning that it was probably a poem which grown-ups could not understand, but which, we felt,

would be comprehended immediately by children. We wanted to know, we said, what they thought the poet meant to say in the poem. Much to our surprise they liked it. This symbolic, highly metaphysical lyric was instantly interpreted by them as a romantic adventure poem of "The Highwayman" type. One youngster said he knew exactly what the poet was trying to tell. The Traveller was a soldier escaping from the enemy; the people in the house were his father and mother who were afraid to answer because they thought him an enemy spy. A little girl, possibly associating the moonlight and the ringing horse's hoofs with Alfred Noyes' poem, thought the Traveller was a robber and the people inside were sharp witted enough to remain silent when he called to them.

We were impressed with the fact that, although each child had a different version, the poem was to them both clear and interesting. That is, it meant something very definite.

Let us say, however, that we were not attempting to cajole them into an analysis of their feelings, but, instead, to win from them their versions of the story. Neither did we, in the end, tell them that we were sure they were wrong. That would have been a fatal error. For children, at least it does not matter at all whether the poet's exact idea is acquired. The only thing of importance is that the child is lifted by the experience. We, as teachers, were concerned only in what the poem did to them.

During the year 1927-'28 a first grade teacher in the Raleigh, N. C., schools at-

tempted a more thorough experiment in this field. She won the co-operation of her students at the very beginning by telling them what she wanted to do and asking their help. Once every two or three weeks (she purposely kept this interval so that the reading would be an event, and would not become monotonous) she was going to read poetry to them. At the end of each poem each child was to try to tell her exactly what mental picture he had as a result of the reading.

It became an exciting event. To attain an informality the children were permitted to place their chairs in a semi-circle about her. Each poem was read but once.

Below are listed the immediate responses, taken down as they were given, and not by questions, to "When Icicles Hang by the Wall."

"I saw a picture of Christmas."

"I had a picture of our old home when icicles hung on our shrubs."

"I saw Hallowe'en night with owls hooting."

"I felt the wind blowing."

"I saw the shepherd looking after his sheep."

"I saw leaves falling from the trees."

"I saw blood."

"I had a picture of rain."

"I saw Christmas snow."

"I saw flowers."

"I saw frozen milk."

"I saw Santa Claus."

It may be seen easily that the poem awakened the memory of each child and was immediately associated with some past and vivid experience—Christmas, Hallowe'en, an old home, a rainy day, etc. None of them are even mentioned in the poem. The picture of blood, however, must have been caused by the line, "When blood is nipt, and ways be foul."

Shelley's "To Night," on the other hand, awakened memories both of real and literary experiences. Its beautiful imagery, beginning with the first verse and carried throughout the poem, obviously re-created mental pictures they already possessed.

To them the lyric meant the following:

"The sun going down."

"Clouds getting thick."

"The moon coming up."

"The stars coming out."

"The sun setting."

"Pink clouds at sunset."

"Stars breaking through the sky."

"Evening star coming out."

"Birds going to roost."

"Angels strolling around at night."

"The moon shining through the curtains at night."

"Birds asleep in their nests."

"Ships sailing at sea."

"Flowers going to sleep."

"Fairies tripping around the house."

"That reminds me of 'at evening when I go to bed, I see the stars shine overhead.'"

Suggestions of Rose Fyleman and of Stevenson, both of whom were known by the pupils, are in evidence here. The figure of speech—that of night walking noiselessly across the world—was not seen by them.

Lydia Maria Child's "Thanksgiving-Day," the familiar poem beginning with the lines,

"Over the river and through the wood,  
To grandfather's house we go,"

brought forth the following remarks, which also might be interpreted as the results of individual experiences, although several are suggested by the poem:

"I saw children riding in a buggy."

"I saw grandmother making pumpkin pies."

"I saw Santa Claus riding through the snow."

"I saw grandmother's cap through the window."

Walter de la Mare's "Some One" produced pictures that were almost entirely different with each child.

"I thought of company coming to call."

"I thought of pulling out a tooth."

"It made me think of honey-bees."

"I saw a mother fairy taking care of baby fairies."

"I saw the wind blowing the doors."

"I always think of the moon when I hear about fairies."



"The Little Elf," by John Kendrick Bangs, a most simple little lyric that develops only one picture—that of the tiny elf—brought forth responses that were as dissimilar as those listed above.

"I saw fairies shutting up the flowers."  
 "I saw Santa Claus."  
 "I thought of little teeny men."  
 "I saw kewpies."  
 "I thought of little babies."  
 "I saw flowers with butterflies."

Below are listed some of the other remarks made by the children concerning the poems read.

"The Sands of Dee"  
 (Kingsley)

"I thought of swimming."  
 "I thought of sheep and lambs."  
 "I saw the ocean."  
 "I saw sea shells."  
 "I saw somebody being drowned."

"I thought of making toad frog houses."  
 "I saw some fishes."  
 "I saw sand."  
 "I saw cows."  
 "I saw someone calling the cattle home."  
 "I thought of catching crabs."

"A Boy's Song"  
 (Hogg)

"I saw a swimming pool."  
 "I saw a ship sailing on the water."  
 "I saw a hayfield."  
 "I thought of Little Boy Blue behind a haystack."  
 "I saw squirrels getting up nuts."  
 "I saw nuts falling to the ground."  
 "I saw fish swimming around."  
 "I saw blackbirds flying."  
 "I saw shadows on the ground."  
 "I saw sea shells rolling up on the beach."  
 "I saw children playing in the sand pile."  
 "I saw two little boys."

(Continued on page 21)

## SHADE OF SAMUEL MORSE

(Continued from page 7)

Speakers were chosen after a series of competitive speeches. Each pupil in the class, with the exception of those who were planning the dramatization, prepared a talk, and the class chose the best one on each topic. An attempt was made to eliminate memorized speeches. Of the speakers chosen, no one said exactly the same thing during the successive composition periods devoted to practice, since it was felt that the idea was more important than a memorized talk.

When the morning arrived for the program, Morse and his assistants were busy connecting the telegraphs and batteries. During the short play itself, Morse actually made a telegraph which worked successfully. When the message was being sent from Washington to Baltimore, the telegraphs balked two or three times, but these minor difficulties only lent a realistic touch to the performance and couldn't have been

better "stage business" if they had been planned.

The entire procedure, from the beginning to the final presentation before the assembly was an eye-opener to the composition teacher. Whereas before he was a slight skeptic of the project method, now he can see it as a most successful method. One of the boys in the class, really a problem case in many respects until he became the announcer for the program, summed up the attitude of the entire class when he inquired two or three days later, "When are we going to do something else like that work on the telegraph?"

And now the instructor is vainly searching the depths of his past experiences for another project. But the telegraph project seemed to be a matter of spontaneous combustion. How can you set the spark going by artificial means?



# The Old and the New in English Instruction\*

ROY IVAN JOHNSON

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THE OLD persists in practice long after the new has established itself in theory. On the other hand, much that we call new in theory has long been practiced by numerous teachers whose intuitive judgment of values and whose alert common sense have dictated their classroom procedures. To endeavor to draw a thin line of division between the old and the new, therefore, is extremely hazardous. It invites contradiction at every turn. But if we fix our attention upon the broad zone of modern thought and practice which separates the education of yesterday from the education of tomorrow and in which the old blends with the new to produce the best pedagogical product which the education of today can offer, then we may by careful observation discern definite developing tendencies in current practice which challenges our attentive study. Such tendencies, if they are congenial to our own ways of thought, we like to call "progressive." For every person, in his own esteem, is progressive. Even the most extreme reactionist in education defends his position on the ground that true progress depends upon conserving and stabilizing the practices of the past. There is, of course, a certain element of justice in this view. We may all, therefore, reserve the right to judge for ourselves the value of new modes of instruction with which teachers today are experimenting.

In the course of the few minutes which are allotted to me I shall mention briefly six significant tendencies which I believe to be characteristic of the progressive viewpoint in English instruction.

**1. Selective standards for instruction are replacing the omnibus type of teaching.** Even yet, however, one does not need to seek far to find classrooms in which pedagogical exhortations overreach the practical possibilities of the learners: All the items of punctuation, word usage, and sentence structure are included in the instruction of the fifth grade; they are wearily repeated in the sixth; they become objects of lamentation in the seventh; they are religiously retaught in the eighth; and in the high school the weakness of the pupils in one and all of these items is held up as an irrefutable indictment of the efficiency of elementary school training.

Over against this spread of effort stands the policy of definite cumulative standards. We may not know exactly *what* to teach in the fifth grade, or the fourth, or the sixth, but we are coming to believe that a dozen items mastered are better than ten times as many ornamenting the course of study for the appearance of academic completeness. As already suggested, the grade standards adopted must be cumulative. The language skills mastered in the fourth grade must be carried forward into the fifth where new standards will be added. In the sixth the requirements of the preceding years will be continued with the addition of a small number of new items. Such a policy lends definiteness to the work and enables each pupil to discern more clearly his own progress in the subject.

**2. The organization of language instruction around unifying items of content is rapidly displacing the hodgepodge language course.** But it is still

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possible to find courses of study recommended in textbooks and in curriculum bulletins which seem to represent a chance shuffling of a large number of possible "lessons" in English. Little thought is given to the sequence of the materials or to the problem of providing a natural content for language expression. The tendency today is to accept social experience as the organizing basis of language instruction. The topics treated in a course in social science may become the unifying headings in a language course. This has the advantage of placing primary emphasis upon the thought to be expressed and giving to details of form their proper secondary relationship. It is also a most effective way of teaching pupils to explore the fields of individual and social experience for the subject-matter of composition. Furthermore, to present the materials of the course organized into logical units facilitates learning. (The word "unit" is used here in its ordinary dictionary meaning, and not with any technical or semi-technical application.)

The "project," which at one time it was the pride of methodologists to define and the despair of students to understand, also has found a place as an organizing vehicle for the English course of study. Some courses seem to be made up almost entirely of successive English projects. So long as the projects are group enterprises out of which numerous language activities grow, no serious objection can be rendered to this method of securing at least a semblance of organization in the course, particularly if the projects provide social motivation for the group or bring into greater relief the content topics with which the language instruction is correlated. But so great are its dangers and so common its abuses that a word of warning is perhaps not out of place. A so-called "language project" which is not a carrier of language activities is a common type of pedagogical delusion. It may prove to be convenient busy work, or it may incidentally afford training in drawing or other skills, but the

language element fails almost entirely to appear or fades out as the enterprise develops. Under such perverted use the project loses its educational defense.

But whatever devices of instruction may be used, the significant fact remains that the improved fabric of the modern course of study in English contains the organizing warp of social content together with the woof of appropriate language activity.

**3. The language activities for which training is given are those which actually function in the common experience of men and women.** The things for which language is used out of school should be the things, so far as practicable, for which language is used in school. This is a theory which is blithely accepted by curriculum makers and textbook writers and as blithely ignored, oftentimes, in their procedures. In many of the grade-school English courses can be seen the reflection of the academic classifications and prescriptions of college composition with its pure description, its formal argumentation, and its rhetorical analysis. But the common acceptance of the social theory of English training will force a wider emergence of functional activities in school practice. Children will make reports of personal experiences, they will write letters, engage in conversation, give directions to one another, tell stories. Thus they will perform, on a child level, those activities which they will continue to perform as adults at the dictation of social need. The functionalized curriculum in English is yet to be achieved, but the movement in the direction of such a curriculum is unmistakable.

**4. There is a much more liberal use and a much more intelligent use of the imitative factor in learning than ever before.** In the development of skills the trinity of learning is knowledge (or instructional controls), practice, and imitation. A little introspection or observation will reveal the important part which each plays in the improvement of one's ability to do certain tasks. In adding conscious

imitative practice to the pupils' learning experiences, we are utilizing a basic psychological principle. How to use models of composition most effectively is an inviting problem for experimental study. But even though our methods may need considerable refinement, I am thoroughly convinced that, under sympathetic direction, imitative practice may be made one of the most fruitful devices of composition teaching.

In choosing models for use, however, it must be borne in mind that the creation of literary types is not the goal for most pupils. If the "functional centers" of language expression are to be used in building the course, then the models which the pupil needs are models of the functional type—a good explanatory paragraph, a good letter, a good story of personal experience, a good class talk. Isolated sentences and paragraphs may, of course, be used without regard to their source, in developing a feeling for structure. But in the main the exercises in imitative composition should support and supplement the language practice dictated by common need. It should be consistent with the functional character of the course. Except in unusual cases, therefore, the distinctly literary selection representing a conventional literary type is of doubtful value as a model for practice in the language course. At later levels a little experimentation with literary forms probably leads to keener appreciation of the skills involved in literary production—but in such cases we are dealing with the problem of literary appreciation and not with the development of practical language abilities.

**5. Assimilation and expression are looked upon as mutually complementary phases of language experience.** For example, in the processes of reading and writing there are certain common thought elements whose importance may be reinforced in the mind of the pupil by this dual approach. To establish the proper basis for the effective correlation of the assimilative and expressional phases of

language training, much more extensive explorations in the psychology of language are needed. This is a field of investigation in which psychological studies are least adequate and in which our instructional need for greater knowledge is most acute. To take a concrete instance of this correlated use of reading and writing, let us suppose that our immediate purpose is to teach the pupil to make a logical plan for a story. We find at once that the recognition of the parts of a story which the class is reading stimulates the organizing faculty of the pupil and makes him more alert in planning his own work. He sees that certain laws of thought relation function in writing as well as in reading. The interpretation of reading as constructive thinking has exercised a most significant influence upon the whole range of English instruction.

**6. Another important characteristic of the new teaching is the emphasis upon pupil judgment of value.** This may take the form of group judgments or individual judgments of selected work; or it may take the form of self-appraisal. Certainly the goal to be attained by the pupil is an intelligent evaluation of his own work in the light of definite standards. There is no more futile practice in the whole category of pedagogical abuses in English teaching than the continual and exclusive marking of pupils' papers by the teacher. Marks are of no educational value unless they force an analysis of merit by the pupil. A pupil cannot continue to command the services of a teacher to put her mark of approval or disapproval upon his later efforts. He must learn to say, "I think this is good *because* ———;" "I am not satisfied with this *because* ———;" "This would be better *if* ———." To lead the pupil into the habit of measuring his own degree of success by conscious attention to accepted standards is the greatest single educational achievement within the reach of the teacher of language.

Time will not permit comment upon a



more extended list of tendencies apparent in modern theories of English instruction. It may be well, however, to give a somewhat more inclusive view of the subject than that afforded by the brief discussion of the six items already mentioned. Let us suppose that you are faced with the responsibility of building a unit of instruction in a language course which you hope will be called a "progressive" course in English. What requirements for such a unit can you put down with confidence as a guide in your work? Or, by what standards can you judge your product when you have finished? Here is a tentative list for your consideration. The items already mentioned are incorporated (in modified form) in order to give greater completeness to the list.

1. Definite standards must be set up in connection with each activity.
2. Standards should be few but persistently carried forward.
3. Some unifying method of organization must be employed.
4. Social science topics provide the best content background because they represent the most vital experiences for training.
5. The language activities must be either directly or indirectly functional from a social standpoint.
6. Appropriate models should be introduced at frequent intervals.
7. Reading and writing should be correlated in such a way as to emphasize (or

train) the common thought functions involved.

8. Pupils should be urged to inspect and appraise their own work carefully.

9. The spirit of work and purposeful activity should be emphasized.

10. So far as possible the methods of instruction which are suggested should be adaptable to socialized procedure.

11. In the lower grades most language activity will probably be on the play level.

12. Practice of correct forms will frequently, if not usually, take the place of the study of rules.

13. No grammar should be introduced before the sixth grade—and then only the elementary understandings of sentence parts.

14. A certain amount of differentiation of instruction may be cared for by a liberal suggestion of a variety of pupil activities, numerous individual and group enterprises, supplementary readings, etc.

15. Summary tests of a very definite character should conclude each unit of instructional material (a) on the social content included and (b) on the language practices which have been recommended.

Any course of study which satisfies these requirements is, in my opinion, a modern and progressive course of study. The requirements set down are not particularly new in theory; but how new they are in practice may best be judged by applying them to current textbooks, courses of study, and classroom procedures.



# The Value of the Present Tendencies in Elementary School English\*

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PRESENT practices in the field of elementary school English offer a wide departure from the program of twenty years ago. Now we are emphasizing the socialization of the English content and of the literature we present, we are relating English not only to the recreational and utilitarian needs of life, but we are also integrating it with the other school subjects, and we are giving a quantity of practice each day that was not to be thought of in the more rigid and narrow subject program of the olden time. No longer is English confined in a compartment by itself and brought out for a twenty or forty minute airing each day. Instead, our boys and girls are talking, writing, and reading continually in school and out. Self expression, creative writing, integration through activities—these are the modes for which many of us are standing today.

In our minds we feel that we are right in adopting these present modes. But a feeling of rightness alone is not tangible enough as objective evidence. And there are times when, under loss of perspective or at the challenge of our theories by the layman, doubt of the rightness of our procedures assails us and we long for the days of the past when all that took place within the walls of the school room was inherently correct because mental venturings never traversed greater distances than those bounded by the covers of the text book. That the pupil mind found exit to imagination in life outside the school, we know. And there was much to inspire in those

academic days. Probably we have gained and probably we have lost ground in both imaginings and practicalities. It will be interesting to evaluate the tendencies of today and to point out our apparent weaknesses and strength.

In the first place, there is probably no one who would dispute the statement that the much practice which we are giving children in the use of oral and written English has some value. The world today demands glibness and quick reactions. It asks for oral and written responses in dozens of situations which never existed twenty years ago. We cannot hope to supply the pupil with all these needed responses. We cannot even guarantee a perfect response from each child in any one thing. Consequently the schools of today must continue to give such practice as will serve the average individual for average needs. We are trying to discover what those average situations are and to plan the correct schoolroom activities which will insure that practice is provided. Those who have seen Miss McBroom's *COURSE OF STUDY IN WRITTEN COMPOSITION*<sup>1</sup> will find that it is constructed upon such basic experiences. Too much cannot be said of the value of such aids both to the experienced and to the inexperienced teacher. In Dr. Hosis's course of study and in that of the Kansas City schools we were given some of our first suggestions for schoolroom activities in English which would keep us conscious of the necessary goals to be reached. How different such a program is

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<sup>1</sup>McBroom, Maude, *THE COURSE OF STUDY IN WRITTEN COMPOSITION FOR THE ELEMENTARY GRADES*. University of Iowa Monographs in Education. Dec. 1, 1928. Iowa City, Iowa.

from that in which a few children were taught to write accurately and with polish while the rest limped along and gradually emerged from the schoolroom to take the inarticulate jobs of life.

Today our pupils are being criticized because their standards of writing and speaking do not have the high quality that life demands. The answer to this criticism is that if life demanded such high quality from all, the quality would be forthcoming. It does not demand a one hundred per cent quality from everyone. It demands rather quantity and variety. We are told that fifty per cent of the people today will never be above mediocrity of taste in reading. The limitation is set by intelligence. If this is true of reading, it must also be true of such a closely related subject as English. Our problem then is to see that half of our pupils remain above this line of mediocrity and that the remaining fifty per cent are as near to the half way mark as we can get them. The problem is even more difficult than it seems for there is no elementary school teacher so gifted with clairvoyance or divine power as to be able to determine which of her pupils is slated to become one of this select fifty per cent intelligentsia in reading and English. The best that can be done under such a situation is to give general training to all with emphasis on a few specifics. We should be able then to prove the value of the present tendencies in one way by seeing to it that the large quantity of practice in oral and written English which is being given today brings a pupil consciousness of certain outcomes. Such outcomes should include first a pleasant speaking voice; even with a poor selection of words and inadequate thoughts, one may secure a fair livelihood and give certain enjoyment to others if the voice strikes agreeably upon the ear of the listener. This value is not emphasized enough today. We should give it a more prominent place in

our present tendencies in elementary English. For some reason, little children enter the primary grades with voices full of color, variety, and tone, but by the end of the third grade, much of those fine qualities are lost. Whose fault it is, we do not know. Perhaps we teachers give too little in the way of example within the schoolroom. And it may be that the demands of social life are too much for most good speaking voices to survive.

But there are values other than a good speaking voice which we can prove more readily to be present today. Unquestionably without school activity programs, with the many projects and problems based upon life needs, and the relation of English to the other content subjects of the classroom, we are giving boys and girls more to think, talk, and write about today. And English is not by any means their sole method of expression. No longer is English expression divorced from art, music, literature, yes—even science, history, geography and arithmetic. Just as today we are trying to make every lesson a lesson in citizenship, so we are attempting to impress the fact that every lesson should be a lesson in English. The way in which a child expresses his answer is now as important as the answer itself. It is not enough to know certain science facts; one must be able to arrange these into a good, organized outline and to discuss the facts thus outlined. The Baltimore School Bulletin under date of September-October, 1929,<sup>2</sup> gives a fine example of such relation of English and science as worked out by Misses Rawlings and Bach. A new bulletin<sup>3</sup> has been put out by the State Department of Education in Indiana, which gives in detail a large number of activities contributed by teachers to show the relation of English to all the other school subjects. Our first grade children are learning to talk to the point under such pupil-made standards as:

<sup>2</sup>Rowlings-Bach, "Correlation of English and Science," BALTIMORE BULLETIN OF EDUCATION. Sept.-Oct., 1929, p. 3. Public Schools, Baltimore, Md.

<sup>3</sup>Dept. of Public Instruction, ACTIVITIES RELATING LANGUAGE ARTS TO THE SOCIAL STUDIES, CITIZENSHIP, SCIENCE, MUSIC AND ART, HYGIENE IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS OF INDIANA. Bulletin No. 107 A-1. Indianapolis, 1929.

Did the audience seem to like what was said?

Did the speaker and the audience help by looking at each other?

Was it worth while?

Our second and third grade children are being given patterns of thought which will aid in solving any problem in the field of nature study or science. For instance, we are using some such thought pattern as this when children bring in specimens of outdoor life. The children are taught to ask,

- (1) What is it?
- (2) Is it helpful or harmful?
- (3) Where can we find out about it?
- (4) What can we do about it?

With such a grooving of questions, even the slower children make some progress in following and contributing to a line of thought. Thus the patterning of thought proceeds throughout the grades. Much more needs to be done. For each of us is continually being faced in life with a problem for which we have no mental pattern. And the resultant fatigue of organization and of constructive planning deters many a person from higher levels of thinking and living.

Another phase of progress today has to do with the matter of individual differences and the present modes of evaluating these. For instance, in a group of six third grade children, all assigned the same problem of describing one interesting trick or habit they had seen in an animal, the following stories were secured. These are given exactly as written and include all of the original mistakes.

#### INVENTORY OF PUPIL COMPOSITIONS Grade 3A

I

My Cat

I hade a big back cat.  
His name is Felix  
On Friday I alwase brang home soom  
fish for him.  
One Friday the cithen floor—  
was wash  
I gave him the fish on the clean

floor he picte is up and took it and  
put it on a papper and eate it.  
Wood you like to have Felix?  
If he had not put it on the papper I  
wood of had to wach the floor after  
him.

By Robert H.

Spelling: 10 wrong in 50 words (Asked for none).

Sentence sense: 7 out of 8 sentences right.

Capitals: 1 out of 8 omitted at sentence beginning.

Tenses: 2 wrong out of 12.

Punctuation: Correct (Knows use of ?)

#### II

My Dog.

I have a little dog.

When I go to feed my dog  
he jumps upon me he fa-  
lls on his back but he d-  
ose not care.

Ourthor

Phyllis T.

Spelling: 1 wrong in 22 words (Asked for none).

Sentence sense: 2 right out of 3 sentences.

Capitals: 1 out of 3 omitted at sentence beginning.

Tenses: Correct.

Punctuation: Hyphenates 1 syllable words.

#### III

My black cat is very polite after she  
eats her food. she is very black and  
some times is very playful. when I  
play with my dolls she comes and  
sits on my lap. her name is blackey.  
when i was at my table drawing  
yesterday she came and jumped on the  
table

and sit right in the middle of it  
by

Virginia H.

Spelling: All 40 words correct (Asked for none).

Sentence sense: All correct.

Capitals: 3 out of 4 omitted at sentence beginning, i for I; b in Blackey.

Tenses: 1 wrong out of 11.

Punctuation: Correct.

#### IV

My dog is black. every time  
my dog is hungry it barks  
ween i go out she jumps up hi she  
almost nocks ne done.

Jack L.

Spelling: 4 wrong out of 21 (Asked for 2).

Sentence sense: 3 right of 4 sentences.

Capitals: 1 out of 4 omitted at sentence beginning, i for I.

Tenses: Omits periods after sentences.

Punctuation: Omits periods after sentences.

#### V

I have two white rabbit they have got  
in a habit of having raisees of run-  
ing up and down there shoot. One  
morning Mother went down to feed them  
and when she got down there they were



having a raise and when she open the door. they where hammering wite here back feet. then mother feed them and wente to the house.

Author Mary K. L.

Spelling: 9 wrong out of 40 (Asked for 4).  
Sentence sense: 1 right out of 4 sentences.  
Capitals: 2 out of 4 omitted at sentence beginning.  
Tenses: 2 wrong out of 9.  
Punctuation: Correct.

#### VI

I have a little Kitty. I never see him dirty. Just before he eat's he always washes. I feed him milk But after he eat's he washes his feet. Then he goes into the front room. And lie's down on the hearth.

Author

Laddie L. S.

Spelling: All (33) words correct (Asked for 5).  
Sentence sense: 5 right out of 6 sentences.  
Capitals: 1 out of 6 omitted at sentence beginning. Asked for capital J.  
Tenses: O. K. but put 's in most plural verbs.  
Punctuation: Correct. Asked if he should put - in front room.

Now comes the problem of the teacher in analyzing the papers and following the exercise with remedial work based upon the needs shown. How shall this be done? Shall the papers be rated by means of a standard composition scale? Such a procedure will not give a fair estimate of which paper shows the best idea of balance in content and form. It will not give any premium to the child who shows the most novel thinking. And it cannot measure the effort with which the paper was written. As a matter of fact, the child who wrote paper number I, probably the most interesting of all, made the most mistakes in spelling. And yet he gave the most versatility of expression for he used fifty different running words. Of all the papers, number III was written with the most assurance. This child made no mistakes in spelling, used forty different running words, and asked for no help in spelling. She has a good knowledge of sentence sense and of punctuation. Her specific error is concerned with capitalization. The child who wrote this paper is of the meticulous type and one who has to have several impressions of a new idea before it becomes her

complete possession. Once she secures the idea it remains with her. Paper number IV comes from an immature, garrulous, impulsive child. He attempted the least variety in running words and he rarely achieves perfection in even the smallest assignment. He lacks sentence sense, knowledge of capitalization, use of periods; he mixes his tenses and he is a careless worker. He continually needs every kind of clinical treatment in oral and written English.

Paper number VI should receive mention for one peculiar type of error—the over potency of the apostrophe idea which has evidently been acquired by this very precocious child on his own initiative. We have found it difficult to convince this child that he is using the apostrophe wrongly. In fact, he is individualistic enough to feel he has achieved something adult and he likes the appearance of those apostrophes scattered with such prodigality among his verbs. He also refuses to adopt the idea of margins, but produces at all times papers which are marvels of neatness, legibility, and meticulous English expression. He possesses both a spelling and an English conscience as exemplified in the fact that he inquired for the spelling of five words of which he was not sure, and he wished to know if “front room” should have the little line (hyphen) between the two words.

This detailed analysis of individual effort is sufficient to show that much needs to be done further by teachers in this matter of focus on a few specific accomplishments, of practice on these specifics in varied situations, and of attention to the human factors involved in the relation of effort and output.

To take care of individual efforts still further, we are analyzing habits of performance into their particular fields. For instance, it has been a well known fact for years that much of the poor spelling in children's compositions in the lower grades has been due to a lack of two things, a



spelling conscience and a knowledge of correct letter formation. And so today we are teaching children to analyze their spelling mistakes into spelling and penmanship difficulties. A child who makes a poorly written *b* in the word *about*, but gives evidence of knowledge of the correct letter sequence, may call the spelling correct and place a check over the letter *b*. Then he must carry the practice of the needed letter form over into his penmanship period. Such practice should continue throughout all the grades where there is individual need. In fact, the practice is more needed in the upper grades because there are more complex demands to challenge a child's versatility in writing and spelling.

Much more could be said of the value of this special type of tendency in caring for individual needs in English. But there is one other field of English of which we must not fail to make mention. This is the matter of extending the elementary grade child's knowledge of poetry and prose. Whether it is better to store the memory with fewer selections or whether it is more worth while to impress the mind with the many and varied literary materials of today, we do not know. Time and the recreational reading pursuits and the literary output of the next generation will have to determine this. Perhaps we are giving to the children of today a richness of imagery which is at least aiding in keeping fifty per cent of them above the level of mediocrity. It is quite the thing for our elementary school children to be able to name authors and their productions, to quote whole stories and stanzas and to be able to trace these to their sources. All this is being done by progressive teachers as a recreational and a leisure pursuit, not as a formally staged series of lessons in literature to be followed by the inevitable test of the old time type.

It seems that there are few tendencies in elementary English today which we can prove conclusively to be valuable. We know that the separation of the vocabulary

problem into word lists for the speaking, writing, and reading vocabularies has been an important contribution in simplifying the teaching of English. We realize that the school program of today which allows for active and immediate use of the English taught is of inestimable value in providing drill and practice. And we feel that the pupil's accessibility to the present rich heritage of literature is having some outcomes in his spoken and written words. But there is still much that we are not doing and there are present practices which we cannot yet justify. Many of us are doubtful of whether the so-called "language games" which are used by many teachers carry any transfer of skill over into actual life. Neither have we been able to find any better substitute for these games. And a study has been recently made by Miss Amelia Rhynsbarger, Supervisor of Reading in Sioux City, Iowa, which seems to show that, given the same paragraph to be read and comprehended, a child may achieve a perfect score on a follow-up *yes and no* test and fail in comprehension when asked to show by a pictorial concept test what the paragraph states. Her experimental study showed that the comprehension of certain technical or unusual words could not be measured by means of a true and false test, but that the comprehension of the words was clearly shown to be lacking when a child was asked to picture his concept of the words. The same result was true when relationships between words were to be comprehended.

Another instance of wrong following of traditional practice is found in the way we are still using certain stories throughout the grades because we have been told by adults that those will build for character in our pupils. In a study which we are making in Indiana, we are finding that, even if it may be true that such stories work for character formation (and we do not seem to have any positive or negative proof on this point), they have been improperly placed in many instances. We do

not have enough data yet upon which to base recommendations, but the following figures will show how little we know of the attitudes and understandings which children have toward these stories.

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR EXPERIMENT

*Study:* Relating literature and citizenship.

*Purpose:* To determine children's opinions of the citizenship lesson which a story illustrates.

*Method:*

## Grade I

1. Teacher tells children "I shall read a story to you. See if you can tell me what this story teaches you to do."
2. Teacher reads story *without comment*.
3. After reading, children come to teacher one at a time, tell what they think the story teaches, and teacher records gist of what child says, as:

It pleases me to be kind to animals.

4. Please do not comment on story or influence children's answers by your suggestions. All children are not expected to get the meanings of stories.

## Grades II-VIII

1. Teacher gives children paper upon which to record opinion.
2. Teacher tells children "I shall read you a story. When I finish, will you write one sentence on your paper to tell the citizenship lesson that the story teaches us. Begin your sentence like this sentence I put on the board: "This story teaches us ....."
3. Teacher reads story *without any further comment*.
4. Children record one sentence as directed in (2) above.

## Tabulation:

1. Fill in blanks as requested.
2. Fit the children's answers under character traits, as follows:

Child's Name	Answer Written by Child	Trait Shown in Answer
Jack Blount	The story teaches us kindness to animals.	Kindness (to animals)

One conclusion which we may form from this limited data which has already been gathered is that while in the main, a story may contain the qualities as analyzed by Starbuck and Shuttleworth,<sup>4</sup> yet there are too many of our pupils who show no consciousness of such qualities. Even if the stories are to be used only as a literary or enjoyable experience, our accumulating data seems to show that a large number of the children in the first four grades have either a zero or a vague idea of even the simple happenings in the story. In other words, in spite of much that has been written on the subject, we know too little about *why* children enjoy or do not enjoy certain stories. And if we are to set up for children any kind of nucleus in literary heritage, a nucleus which we may know to be inherently correct as a part of the basic

## QUALITIES WHICH CHILDREN FOUND IN THE STORIES

Story	Grade	No. of children	No. of teachers reporting	No Meaning	Ambition	Bravery	Fairness	Fellowship	Goodness	Gratitude	Happiness	Helpfulness	Honesty	Industry	Kindness	Loyalty	Moderation	Neatness	Obedience	Persistence	Politeness	Resourcefulness	Responsibility	Thrift	Usefulness	Wisdom	Cleanliness	Health	Caution	Contentment	Starbuck and Shuttleworth Rating	Qualities	Grade		
Dust Under the Rug	Kg	64	4	5																												(2-5)	Helpfulness Conscientiousness		
	1	154	8	7																															
	2	299	15	26																															
	3	115	4	12																															
	5	53		2																															
	6	63		2																															
	7	59		2																															
	8	47		2																															
Town Mouse and Country Mouse	Kg	33	1	31																														(2-5)	Contentment Moderation Discrimination
	1	332	14	199																															
	2	246	12	78																															
	3	52		16																															
	4	124	5	27																															
	5	71		10																															
	6	103	4	3																															
Cornelia's Jewels	Kg	20	1	12																															
	1	57	3	35																															
	2	104	7	59																															
	3	131		31																															
	4	173	10	28																															
	5	142	9	30																															
	6	240	11	29																															
	7	81	4	5																															
	8	89	6	9																															

<sup>4</sup>Starbuck, E. D.—Shuttleworth, F. K. A GUIDE TO LITERATURE FOR CHARACTER TRAINING. Macmillan Company, 1928.

experiences in life, then we should be discovering by more thorough means which of our best literature is most appropriate to the enjoyment and welfare of our pupils. Adult opinions, library and teacher made lists, the literary experts, our best publishers—all these are very well as guides in selection, but they are not enough when it comes to planning for the fifty per cent of our boys and girls who are below mediocrity in reading and thinking levels. These pupils need more of our thought in the planning of a literary heritage which will be good but not beyond their abilities in understanding and enjoyment. For we must remember that while the growth of a literary nation may depend upon the leaders and more creative thinkers, yet the stability of that nation is determined in large measure by the responsibility which the leaders assume in protecting the literary life of those who must always be followers. What this program of protection should be is one of our important problems as teachers of English. Let us hope that a sane, nationwide program may be forthcoming at a not too-distant date.

In summary then, these are the points in

our elementary English program upon which we need to continue our quest for best practices:

- (1) the socialization of English content and literature
- (2) the relating of English to recreational and utilitarian needs of life
- (3) the integration of English with the other school subjects
- (4) the amount and quality of oral and written practice
- (5) a correct balance in requirements of thought and form in written work
- (6) the attention to needs revealed by a study of individual differences
- (7) the possible solutions for the need of a literary heritage.

Perhaps this discussion of the value of present tendencies in English has left us just where we began. But at least, an attempt has been made to bring forward for inspection some of the strongest tendencies of today and to turn upon them the light of honest criticism. If we can continue thus to criticise our thinking and at the same time to affiliate the outcomes of our thought with the trends of the time, certainly there will be no limit to the progress which can be made in this field of elementary English.

## AN EXPERIMENT IN TEACHING POETRY

*(Continued from page 10)*

The other poems read elicited the same type of responses. They, too, were simple lyrics, creating only one definite picture.

Although we must grant that a child is unable to express himself in words with perfect truthfulness, yet, in spite of this, there is something suggestive, at least, in these attempts to disclose the thoughts caused by the reading of certain poems. In the first place, the mental pictures are decidedly varied. Most of the time they

are in no way connected with the poems. It may be noticed, too, that each child did have a real and most clear image, and that the image quite often was associated at least with something experienced vividly in the past.

This co-operative, chatty method of presenting poetry became a stimulus for a study of poetry that was in no way artificial.



# National Council of Teachers of English\*

NINETEENTH ANNUAL MEETING, KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI,  
November 28-30, 1929

## REPORT OF CONFERENCES RELATING TO ELEMENTARY ENGLISH

ON FRIDAY, November 29, 1929, at the meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English in Kansas City, the newly organized Committee on Elementary School English held an open session to discuss plans for the coming year. A large number of delegates indicated their interest in this field of English by attending this conference.

Miss Frances Dearborn, Chairman of the Committee, presided. She explained the origin and purpose of the Committee.

"This Committee was organized in October of this year in accordance with provisions stated in the contract between the National Council and The Elementary English Review," Miss Dearborn said. "The purpose of the Committee is to prepare professional reports, reading lists, etc., comparable to similar matter at present available for high school teachers of English."

The Committee is constituted as follows:

Frances R. Dearborn, State Normal School, Terre Haute, Indiana, chairman

Conrad T. Logan, State Teachers College, Harrisonburg, Virginia

Thomas Blaisdell, State Normal School, Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania

C. C. Certain, Detroit Teachers College, Detroit, Michigan

Carrie Belle Parks, Indiana State Teachers College, Indiana, Pennsylvania

Alice Bovard, Greenwood School, Kansas City, Missouri

I. Jewell Simpson, Assistant State Superintendent of Schools, Baltimore, Maryland

Arthur S. Gist, Principal of the Training School, San Francisco State Teachers College, San Francisco, California

Among the tasks to be undertaken by the Committee are the following:

1. The compilation of a recreational reading list for elementary school children, grades one to eight, inclusive.

2. The formulation of criteria for the organization of professional courses in the elementary English curriculum of teacher training institutions.

3. The making of a course of study in elementary school English based upon children's interests, grades one to eight, inclusive.

The compilation of a recreational reading list for children will be the major, immediate undertaking of the Committee. The discussion of this task was lead by Dr. Blaisdell. Dr. Blaisdell expressed the belief that it is the duty of the grades to fix the reading habit. Boys and girls must touch books if they are going to read. Especially in grades four, five and six must the habit be fixed. Every schoolroom should have its own library of books which will attract children to recreational, not informational, reading. Dr. Blaisdell's advice to teachers is to get such a library started somehow—wear out their own books if necessary. There should also be a building library, but if only one impossible, have the room collection.

Mr. C. C. Certain spoke of general plans for developing a membership in the elementary section of the Council in order that it may function properly in its undertakings. The selection of books for the recreational reading list must be a group undertaking to be of value. Individual studies have

\*General minutes of the convention will be published in the February Review.



already been made of children's interests. These studies are available, along with much authoritative discussion on scientific procedure in book-selection, and furnish valuable aids toward the preparation of the reading list. The need, however, is not for extensiveness but for selectiveness. What teachers know of children's needs and interests should be the basis for the elimination of all doubtful titles from the list. Such a list should be comprehensible to the child as well as to the teacher; it should be a guide to reading that the child will want to own and consult.

In speaking of the second task, the formulation of criteria for professionalized training courses, Miss Carrie Belle Parks remarked that the whole background of the elementary teacher was involved. It must first be determined what this background should be. To determine this is a critical matter, but once this background is formulated, a curriculum can be made. Miss Parks gave some criteria for judging a curriculum:

1. The course should reflect the current progressive ideas of curriculum making.
2. The contents should be judged.
3. Standards for using the curriculum should be given.
4. The course should provide for correlation with schools.

The test question should be:

5. Do the courses meet the need of the primary teachers in their fields of work?

Miss Parks asked for suggestions to aid in formulating plans for next year. Shall the proposed course be a subject matter course or a professional one?

Mr. Schnell of Sheboygan, Wisconsin, suggested that there should be a test of native ability for teaching, since good scholars are not necessarily good teachers.

In speaking on the third task proposed, the making of a course of study on children's interests, Miss Eloise Ramsey stated that children who are trained in accordance with recent educational theories do not care very much for the poorer class of movies

or other similar entertainment. Much good work is being done all over the country that no one hears about. The course of study should be carefully criticized if it is to be of value. There is too much acceleration in many courses at present. It is assumed that children are ready to read and interpret without enough basic experiences.

Courses of study should provide for the development of a sequence of skills. A good course of study gives opportunity for individual presentation; it makes the situation vital to children; it prevents the feeling, on the part of the children that they are being "bottled up." Miss Ramsey would like to get in touch with all who are striving to make literature a more living experience for children. Address her at Detroit Teachers College, Detroit, Michigan.

In the general discussion, many interesting points were brought out.

On Saturday morning, November 30, the Elementary Section met to discuss the general topic, "Progressive Tendencies in Elementary School English." Mr. C. C. Certain, who prepared the program, presided.

Dr. Roy Ivan Johnson<sup>1</sup> of St. Louis, discussed "The Old and the New."

"The Value of the Present Tendencies" was ably set forth by Miss Frances R. Dearborn<sup>2</sup> of Terre Haute, Indiana.

Miss Eloise Ramsey<sup>3</sup> of Detroit, Michigan, an authority of children's literature, discussed "Creative Reading."

Mr. W. T. Longshore, Kansas City, Missouri, made the pertinent statement that success depended on the spirit and manner which the teacher possessed. Not everyone should be hurried into the new method, he observed.

There were many expressions of interest in the work undertaken by the new section.

ALICE BOVARD, *Secretary*.

*Kansas City, Missouri,*

*December 2, 1929.*

<sup>1</sup>Dr. Johnson's paper appears on page 11.

<sup>2</sup>See page 15.

<sup>3</sup>Miss Ramsey's paper will be published in the February Review.

## Editorials

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### *Pedagogical Salvage*

THE BEST teaching is hard work. There are no short cuts, no easy methods. The greatest foes that good teaching has are fad-hunters and phrase-mongers.

The fad-hunters have done to death many a good idea in education. The project method, in the class-room of a thoughtful, diligent teacher, was capable of bringing out all of the powers of the pupils. Its potentialities were soon lost, however, in the fast pursuit of fad-hunters, who went after the project as something novel and capable of sensational results. This is typical of the faddist and all his work, whether his fancy be upon the project or something else.

Equally destructive of educational vitality is the phrase-monger's method. Here we have even less show of effort. Glibness of tongue and felicity of phraseology are his stock-in-trade. He holds audiences of teachers spell-bound as he discourses on objectives in sixth grade literature, individualized lesson sheets for seventh grade composition, or creative composition in grade two. Certain phrases seem to acquire a kind of currency in education, under his persistent eloquence. Like legal tender they become a substitute for inherent values.

Consider the word "objective." Within the last ten years "objective" has come to be accepted as a label by phrase-and-word-minded teachers, and is no longer provocative of clear and definite consideration of goals. One can find, in almost any school system, teachers conning the educational "objectives" as the child of another generation memorized the multiplication tables. The pupils themselves soon acquire

glibness of tongue in discussing the "objectives" of their English lessons.

Analysis will show that at bottom the faddist and the phrase-monger have much in common. Both are evasive of the requirements of thought; both are indolent. Rather than put forth the energy necessary to think their way through educational problems, they drift along in the wake of educational thinkers. They stay in the stream as long as there is current enough to carry them; when the current weakens, they transfer to some new, and popular movement.

This process of devitalizing educational thought is resulting in huge waste. There is waste due to the poor teaching of the faddist and the phrase-monger, and the waste resulting from the disrepute that they bring upon educational ideas which in their inception were valuable.

The process goes on and on with the consequent accumulation of educational drift. Into this Sargossa Sea of education go such inherently valuable ideas as individualized instruction, socialization of instruction, project method, contract method, self-directed activity. Here drift also aims, objectives, attitudes, activities, motivation, experience, stimulation. Minimum essentials and measurements will eventually join the discards, as will creative writing, literature as life, composition as behavior, and literature for appreciation.

Some pedagogical treasure-hunting in this sea of wreckage would result in great good fortune for the English classroom. Enough could be salvaged to revolutionize the work in composition and literature and elevate English teaching to that plane to which Rousseau and Pestalozzi and other real thinkers endeavored to raise teaching.